

Nov. 3, 1882

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The Evils of the Liquor Traffic,

And our Responsibility in Reference thereto.

*A Sermon preached in the Dartmouth Baptist
Church on Sabbath Evening, Oct. 29th.*

BY REV. E. J. GRANT.

Published by Request.

HALIFAX, N. S.
CHRISTIAN MESSENGER OFFICE,
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"Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!"—ISA. v. 22, 23.

There are many prophecies in the Word of God which seem to teach that there are better days in store for the inhabitants of this world than have ever yet been enjoyed by any age or nation, prophecies which seem to promise the universal prevalence of justice and truth, of righteousness and peace among men. Take, for example, some portions of the 72nd Psalm, which is allowed by all to be a prediction of the ultimate universal reign of Christ in this world: "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts, yea all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." So in the prophecy of Isaiah, 35th chapter, "The parched ground shall become a pool, and thirsty land springs of water. In the habitation of dragons where each lay shall be grass with reeds and rushes."

No one will doubt that these and many similar predictions have not yet been realized in the history of Christ's Kingdom on earth. All kings have not yet come to serve Him. Indeed, no one nation has ever yet served Him in such a way as He ought to be served. The most Christianized nations of the globe have never yet enjoyed such a measure of righteousness and peace as seem to be anticipated in the Word of God. And there are many earnest Christians who sometimes stand almost paralyzed in view of the wickedness and crime walking abroad in the earth and are ready to ask whether it is possible that the race, so long immersed in darkness, sorrow, and crime, is yet to enjoy universal righteousness and peace? If we look at the problem from the standpoint of human weakness and human tendency to evil we could not hesitate for a moment to answer, *It can never be*. But then let us not forget that evil, though mighty, is not supreme. Let us not forget that God reigns in the universe, and that He has said, "Thus far shalt thou go, but no further." One thing is certain, as certain as if it had already come to pass, namely, that all the good that God has promised in His Word

will yet be realized by the nations of the earth.

We may err in our interpretation of His promises. It may be that He has not promised us as much as we understand His promises to mean, but we stand on solid ground, even on the eternal rock, when we affirm that not one of His promises shall ever fail of complete and perfect fulfilment. However impossible it may seem to us it is as sure as the oath and power of God can make it. It is said that the world is growing worse, and perhaps it is, but even if that fact could be demonstrated it would not shake our confidence in God, nor yet in His power "to destroy the works of the devil." Has He promised and will He not perform? Heaven and earth may cease to be, but His promise shall never fail.

What then? Does this assurance that God will ultimately triumph over the powers of darkness give us a license to lessen our energy in the struggle against evil and crime? No, He gives us these promises not that we may be idle, but rather that we may be nerved for the conflict, and fired with holy zeal in the struggle against every form of iniquity.

The Millennium *will come*. God has promised it. But when and how? One thing is certain, it will not be contemporaneous with the monster evil Intemperance, whose crushing hoof is now upon the neck of the civilized world. It will not come while honest men are afraid of those who have the impudence to ask for their support in carrying on the *infamous traffic* in strong drink. It *will not*, it *cannot*, come while we con-

tinue to "justify the wicked for reward."

The text describes the liquor traffic as it exists at the present day so exactly that it needs not one word of enlargement in order to shew its bearing on that iniquitous business. If the prophet had spent the forenoon in walking the streets of this town counting the liquor shops, and the afternoon in the Town Hall reading the names on the license petitions, he could not have described the traffic, and the part which the better thinking portion of our citizens take in it, in more fitting words than those of the text, "Who justify the wicked for reward." The stand which many take in reference to this great evil cannot, it seems to me, be justified by any show of fair reasoning. No one will hesitate to pronounce the traffic not only an evil, but the *greatest* evil that afflicts the civilized world at the present day. Those who sell it, those who drink it, and those who do neither, are agreed in pronouncing it *evil, nothing but evil*. Why, then, do all continue in the business? It is easy to answer the question for the first two classes mentioned. Those who sell it do so to make money, they will tell you that they have no other motive, and if any of them should have the boldness to deny that to be their only motive you would know that they were speaking falsehood. Those who drink it do so to gratify a craving which is not natural but acquired, but which seems in most cases to get the complete mastery over the impulses of the better nature. But what of those who neither sell nor drink, yet give their voice and

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vote in support of the traffic? Let them answer for themselves. A few of them will say, "It will be sold any way, and it is better to have it *regulated* by law." A pretty good argument, if they could only change that clause in God's Law Book which reads, "Let us not do evil that good may come." The others would answer, "Those who are disposed to sell will sell, license or no license, and so we had better make them pay for the privilege, and thus add to our revenue and lessen our taxes." Upon this class without doubt falls the "woe" of the text. Let us see the rottenness of this argument. There are eight men in this town selling by license, for which they pay fifty dollars each, thus giving to the revenue \$400. But now, on the other hand, what does it cost the town of Dartmouth to support the traffic? 1. Pauper's bill, \$1,200; 2. To supporting County Prisons, \$500; 3. Salary of a second policeman, \$500; 4. Low estimate of charity given, \$700; total, \$2,900; all of which, or nearly all, we pay every year as the result of the rum traffic.

But I feel a little ashamed for having looked at the subject from this standpoint for a moment. It seemed necessary to meet the groundless argument of those who take this stand. Let not dollars and cents have any place when dealing with this monster, not even though a thousand dollars came pouring into our revenue from the foul business for every one dollar which it takes to support it. No. But that which ought to haunt every one of us by day and by night is the fact that scores of pinched and shivering children go from

door to door begging for a crust of bread. Is it possible for such to escape falling into temptation and sin? Can we wonder if many of them shall, in a few years hence, be found looking out through the iron bars of the prison in yonder city? Shall we look upon them and despise them when in a short time we shall see them steeped in the same vices and hardened in the same crimes which have overtaken their wretched parents? Who then, I ask, will be responsible? These eight rumsellers only? *Every man* who has given his name to a petition for the granting of a license; *nay, more, every man* who has not, in every legitimate way, given the full weight of his influence against the curse. Oh, the wretchedness and woes which follow in its train as it goes stalking through the earth, the very embodiment of evil and crime, the essence of every iniquity. Wretched homes all over the land, filled with broken-hearted women and starving children. Pauperism, insanity, suicides, riots, murders, and executions, all pointing to this fiend as their ultimate source and moving cause. Wherever the traffic flourishes there you will find of necessity crime, desolation, and death. It is the mother of every vice, the feeder of every disease, the origin of woe, an outrage on society, and a sin against heaven.

It hurls its filth and defiance in the face of the honest politician, in the face of the philanthropist and preacher. It is the proxy of commerce, the palsy of every honest enterprise, the constant dread of travellers by sea and land, the bane of society generally, spreading out its withering, corrupting influence over

the whole civilized world. With its iron hoof upon the neck of a million helpless women, whose dying groans may be heard in every city, town, and hamlet on this and other continents of the globe, congealing the life-blood in the veins and heart of a million helpless orphans, whose mothers have died of neglect and cruel treatment, and whose fathers have been led as oxen to these human slaughter-houses which infest the land. And yet in the face of all this woe, this desolation and death, men who would be considered benefactors to the race will give their consent, their influence, their voice, and their vote in favor of the cursed traffic.

"Oh, cursed, cursed sin, traitor to God,
And ruiner of man, mother of woe,
And death and hell, wretched, yet seeking worse,
Polluted most, yet wallowing in the mire,
Most mad, yet drinking frenzy's giddy cup,
Depth ever deepening, darkness darkening still."

What then shall we do? Shall we continue to support the traffic in Dartmouth? No one believes more heartily than I do that men ought to be persuaded, entreated, and expostulated with to abandon that which they know to be offensive to God, and ruinous to their fellow men. But is there a man in this congregation who has faith enough to believe that if all the God-fearing people in the town were to go to each of the men engaged in the rum business, and entreat them to quit it, that they would do so? We know they would not. There is money in the business, and we know that those whose only object in this world is to make money are incorrigible. They will not

be turned from their evil purpose by any amount of moral suasion that you can bring to bear upon them. I have nothing against men making money. I rejoice to see men accumulating wealth when they do it honestly, but I hold that it is an outrage on society for a few men to grow rich at the expense of a thousand helpless women and children. But what shall we do about it? You say that we cannot override the customs of society, or defy that power which has given these men the right, in the legal sense, to carry on the traffic. Very true. But who gave them the legal right? Our own citizens. The "powers that be" have said to every community in the Dominion, you can do as you wish in this matter. You can employ men to carry on the infamous business, or you can forbid any man to engage in the traffic. What then can we do? We can put this matter in its true light before the intelligence of this community, and hold it there for a little while, and the people will rise up in their strength and rid themselves of the curse. In this matter the voice of the people in each community is supreme. And if men of influence and position had done their whole duty in this respect in the past, our town would not to day be afflicted with eight corrupt wounds, eating up the vitality of the state, and sucking the life-blood of the churches.

If there are any present who are very conservative or very timid, they will think I am speaking pretty strongly. I can afford to speak strongly and to plead earnestly when pleading the cause of the weak against the strong,

the cause of the helpless against this destroying fiend.

I am aware, however, that speaking never so strongly is not going to affect the evil unless it shall result in bringing our personal responsibility so clearly before us as to set us to work to oppose the evil, and prevent the ever-increasing crime and misery which are always and everywhere the legitimate fruits of the traffic. I hold that the license system is a system of legalized robbery, and for all the immorality, poverty and crime of which the traffic here in Dartmouth has been the cause, every man who has not given the full weight of his influence against it is responsible. *Think* of it, a law on the one hand prohibiting vagrancy and crime, a law which fines the vagrant, imprisons and executes the criminal; and on the other hand a law to protect the rumseller in his infernal business of making vagrants and criminals.

I say it is a system of legalized robbery, and I can make good the statement. How much money has each one of our eight rumsellers taken during the year? I do not know. But there are a few things I will say, without fear of contradiction. I will venture the statement that each rumseller in the town takes more cash in a year than any honest merchant we have. I know that if a rumseller takes one thousand or five thousand dollars in a year his customers are just that much poorer, as he has given them absolutely no value in return. I know that all our honest merchants lose money every year because their customers give to the rumseller the money with which they should

have paid their grocer and tailor. I know that in hundreds of cases families have suffered hunger and cold for want of that money which went to make the rumseller's surroundings magnificent and luxuriant. And have we given men a legal right to carry on a business which robs hundreds of women and helpless children of their bread? Then I hold to it that we have legalized robbery.

I am met here with the *worse* than *weak* argument by which the traffic seeks to justify itself. It is that the rumdrinker is a free agent, and if he goes into a saloon and pays five cents for a glass of rum, drinks it, and falls down before he gets outside of the door and breaks his neck, the rumseller is not in the least responsible, he only complied with the wish of one who was a free agent, and solely responsible for his act. If he murders the first man he meets—the rumseller is not at all responsible, he only complied with the wish of one who was a free agent.

Suppose the free agent instead of asking for a glass of rum, had asked for a glass of poison, would the rum seller give it to him? *No*. Why not? because he would be hanged. Why hanged? He only complied with the request of a free agent who was solely responsible for his act. Why is not even law consistent? If it were what would become of rumsellers?

A man goes into a rum-saloon, asks for a glass of poison, the rumseller gives it to him, the man dies. The poison-seller is hanged at once. But he goes in and asks for a glass of rum, gets it, pays his five cents, goes home

murders his wife, and all his children, is finally hanged himself, but the rum-seller goes about with as high a head as ever, and the people lift their hats as they pass him.

But men who reason will put the responsibility where it belongs. God will put it where it belongs, on the rumseller, and if on him, what about the man who gives his voice and his vote in favour of the traffic?

"Woe unto them who justify the wicked for reward." I have no hesitation in saying that to legalize the sale of ardent spirits, is not only to legalize robbery, but to foster crime and murder as well. And every man who does not give the full weight of his influence against it, is responsible for all the degradation, wretchedness and crime of which the traffic is the cause.

The traffic injures every man, woman and child, in the community where it is carried on. It is difficult to make men who do not themselves indulge, see this. But any intelligent man who gives the subject careful thought, will fail to see the many ways in which even those who have least to do with it, may suffer from it.

Not long since the people of Philadelphia were moved in view of the ever-increasing evils of the traffic, to make some effort for its suppression. The wealthy were appealed to for means to support the movement. One thus solicited said: No, I do not think, the traffic does me no injury, I take care of myself, and I leave others to do the same. But let us see. Before

night there came to that city the sad news of a railroad accident, many were killed, and among the rest the wife, and only daughter of the man who only that day, had declared that the rum traffic did not affect him in the least. Did it affect him? What was the cause of the accident? Conductor drunk and incapable. It affects every one, and hence it is the duty of every one to affect it with the full weight of his opposition. And if it is the duty of every citizen to oppose the infamous business on the ground of its moral wrong, how much more does it become the duty of all who profess allegiance to Christ. I propose on some future occasion to look at this subject from the Bible stand point.

Let me close with a clipping from a newspaper:

"The bottle makes war on religion, then let *religion* make war on the bottle. The bottle makes war on society, let society make war on the bottle. The bottle makes war on the home, then let the home make war on the bottle. The bottle makes war on rich and poor, let rich and poor make war on the bottle.

Strong drink is the cause of nearly all wretchedness and crime.

Strike it out, and strikes will end.

Tramp it out, and tramps will be few.

Murder it, and murders will cease.

Stab it to the heart, and hearts will no longer be stabbed.

Put an everlasting end to the mean thing, and meanness will be the exception instead of the rule.

Set fire to it, burn the last bottle and barrel, and fewer souls will burn in hell."